

AWARDS 2007 SOFTWARE



MICROSOFT Windows Vista Home Premium

Windows Vista's delayed launch might have tested our patience, but it was worth the wait. It takes everything that Microsoft got right with Windows XP and improves on it. The result is the most stable, usable and feature-packed operating system the company has ever created.

Microsoft has made sure that all the applications and tools you'll need to use on your PC are included. For starters, Media Center is now part of Home Premium Edition. When paired with a cheap Freeview TV tuner (around £20), you've got the world's easiest-to-use electronic programme guide (EPG) and the ability to pause and record TV. Even if TV isn't your thing, Media Center's a great way to organise your photos, videos and music.

Dip further into Vista and you'll find new applications. The best is Photo Gallery. This electronic album lets you tag, organise and sort your photos so you'll always be able to find the shot you want.

A big change for Vista is the built-in search function, which works brilliantly. Click the Start button and start typing the name of the file or application you want, and the list quickly refreshes to show you the available options. It lets you do things more quickly and makes using Vista so much easier than XP.

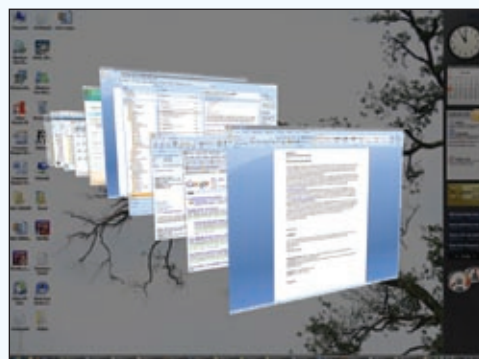
The main interface looks cleaner and makes Windows XP look a little old-fashioned. The new Sidebar is a real bonus as you can add custom widgets to display the current weather, time, email and more.

Windows has often been criticised for being insecure and unstable, but Vista is better on both

fronts. We've been using it since its release and our PCs are far more stable than they ever were with Windows XP. Security is better, too. The new User Access Control (UAC) may be a little annoying at times, but it warns you every time a critical event occurs so you can crack down on malicious software yourself.

Hardware and software support has improved significantly since Vista was launched and we rarely see any hardware or software that won't work. It may not be perfect, but Windows Vista is way better than Windows XP. It wins our Best Software 2007 award.

OPERATING SYSTEM Requires 800MHz processor, 512MB memory, 40GB hard disk, DirectX 9-compatible graphics card for Aero interface
PART CODE 661-00017 **LATEST PRICE** £187 inc VAT from www.staples.co.uk **DETAILS** www.microsoft.co.uk **FULL REVIEW** Mar 2007



▲ Its improved security and stability makes Windows Vista far more than just a pretty interface

EXPERT'S REPORT

Choosing the best software products is one of the hardest jobs of the awards. We review so many programs that cater for such a huge range of different tasks that picking the best is tricky, to say the least.

But when we looked back at the past year, we quickly found a package deserving of the Best Software 2007 title: the year's biggest release. It's a superb package and will be the most important software release for the next few years, dominating how we work with our computers.

Picking the subcategories for our other three winners was a tough choice, but we opted for photo-editing, backup and office software. These best represent the tasks that most people spend most of their time on.

Jim Martin
Reviews Editor



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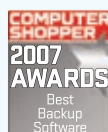
ADOBE Photoshop Lightroom 1.0

Photoshop Lightroom 1.0 is aimed at digital camera owners wanting an easier life. It lets you organise and non-destructively edit your images, before outputting them as slideshows, prints and on the web. From start to finish, Lightroom lets you manage the process of transforming images from your camera into your preferred medium for displaying them.

Photoshop Lightroom is designed primarily for professional photographers, but its workflow features and relatively low price make it just as suitable for amateur enthusiasts. If you've just spent £500 on a digital SLR camera, this software is likely to be an equally worthwhile investment. It's a worthy winner of our Best Photo-Editing Software 2007 award.



PHOTO-EDITING SOFTWARE Requires Windows XP/Vista, Pentium 4 processor, 768MB RAM, 1GB disk space **PRODUCT CODE** 19250102 **LATEST PRICE** £129 inc VAT from www.dabs.co.uk **DETAILS** www.adobe.co.uk **FULL REVIEW** Jul 2007



ACRONIS True Image 10 Home

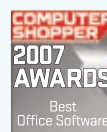
Acronis True Image 10 Home lets you make a complete copy of your PC including the operating system and applications. It's so reliable that you can rest assured that all your data is safe and sound.

It's more than just this, though, because version 10 also works as a sophisticated backup program. This includes the ability to back up certain types of files – such as music or photos – and your emails.

Perhaps the most astounding thing about True Image is that you can currently buy it for just £15 including VAT. This makes it one of the cheapest backup programs around. It is because of its low cost and excellent performance that True Image 10 wins our Best Backup Software 2007 award.



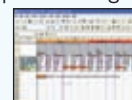
BACKUP SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000 (SP4) or later, Pentium 133MHz, 128MB, 150MB disk space **PRODUCT CODE** AT110 **LATEST PRICE** £15 inc VAT from www.ebuyer.com **DETAILS** www.acronis.com **FULL REVIEW** Apr 2007



OPENOFFICE OpenOffice.org 2.1

Everybody needs an office suite on their PC, but why pay for it? OpenOffice's OpenOffice.org shows the power of open source by delivering a high-quality office suite that includes a word processor, spreadsheet, database and presentation application, all of which are compatible with Microsoft's Office. This latest version is the best yet as it fixes all the problems of the first release, including the clunky word count function in the word processor.

We'd go so far as to say that each application is just as powerful as Microsoft's equivalent. In fact, there's no reason to look elsewhere for your office needs. The fact that it's an excellent product as well as being free makes OpenOffice.org the clear winner of our Best Office Software 2007 award.



OFFICE SUITE Requires Windows 98 or later, Pentium processor, 128MB RAM, 800MB disk space **LATEST PRICE** Free **DETAILS** www.openoffice.org **FULL REVIEW** Sep 2007

ADOBE Premiere Pro CS3

★★★★★

£646 inc VAT

Premiere Pro wasn't ready in time for the CS3 launch earlier this year, but it's now available for both Windows and Intel-based Macs. The main application includes a smattering of improvements, but it's the extras that make it a particularly interesting update.

Time Remapping has joined Motion and Opacity in the list of attributes for each video clip. It produces slow- and fast-motion effects but, unlike a similar feature in Sony Vegas, it doesn't allow clips to be reversed. It does support ripple editing, though, so keyframes (the pointers that signal the beginning or end of a change) move in sync with the footage when earlier keyframes are edited.

Interpolation is used when rendering slow-motion effects, generating extra frames to keep motion smooth. Meanwhile, a new Time Warp effect covers similar ground but includes the ability to flip from forwards to reverse playback and benefits from Premiere Pro's sophisticated bezier keyframe editing, which makes it possible to change speeds smoothly rather than jumping between them. Oddly, its interpolation quality is not as clean as Time Remapping's interpolation.

The other new features are less exciting, although we're pleased to see that H.264 (MPEG4) export is finally included, with templates for Blu-ray, PSP, iPod, mobile phones and websites such as YouTube and MySpace. The lack of AVCHD support is disappointing, though, and is available only through third parties.

Premiere Pro 2's DVD-authoring facilities were best described as basic, but this version comes with Encore CS3, Adobe's professional DVD-authoring application, which previously sold for around £260. It isn't the easiest application to use, but its disc-navigation options are comprehensive and it works seamlessly alongside Photoshop and After Effects for menu design.

New to this version is Blu-ray authoring, complete with menus – the first application we've seen to do this. Encore can also export videos and menus in Flash format for use on the web. We're delighted to see that a single project can be exported to any or all formats without redesigning its content.

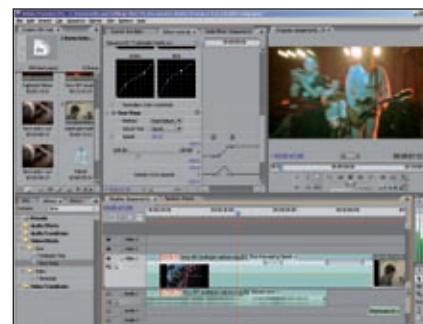
Premiere Pro CS3 also includes OnLocation (previously DV Rack), a program for capturing video directly to the computer while filming. It's

Windows only, captures via FireWire in DV or HDV format and offers various benefits over recording to tape: instant reviewing and cataloguing of takes, a pre-record buffer to capture from up to 30 seconds before you press record, time-lapse and stop-motion capture, video- and audio-analysis tools plus the security of recording to tape and hard disk simultaneously. We don't

SUMMARY

- ✓ Powerful editing environment
- ✓ Sophisticated authoring tools
- ✗ Expensive

VIDEO-EDITING SOFTWARE Requires Windows XP (SP2)/Vista or Mac OS X 10.4.9, Pentium 4 2GHz, 1GB RAM (2.4GHz, 2GB for HD editing), 10GB disk space, 1,280x1,024 display
PRODUCT CODE 25520524
SUPPLIER <http://uk.insight.com>
DETAILS www.adobe.com/uk



▲ Sophisticated speed-manipulation tools join the fantastic colour, distortion and motion effects

much like its interface, which requires you to scroll down to see all the controls on offer. However, it's a well-conceived application that we can imagine becoming completely reliant on.

Adobe doesn't appear too bothered about its competitors: Premiere Pro costs almost twice as much as Avid Liquid and Sony Vegas +DVD. However, the inclusion of Encore and OnLocation reduces this discrepancy to an extent, and makes the £246 upgrade price seem particularly appealing. Premiere Pro starts to look considerably more attractive when it's bought as part of Adobe's Creative Suite bundle. CS3 Production Premium (which costs around £1,500 including VAT) includes Premiere Pro, After Effects Pro, Photoshop Extended, Flash Pro, Illustrator, a new audio-editing application called Soundbooth (an easier-to-use version of Audition) and a powerful chroma-keying tool called Ultra. This bundle is great value as long as you need at least most of the applications, and most serious video producers probably do.

Ben Pitt

IMSI TurboCAD Deluxe 14

★★★★★

£80 inc VAT

You'd think that a program with the word 'Deluxe' in the title would be the most advanced version of the program that was available. TurboCAD Deluxe 14, however, is the most basic version that IMSI offers, costing just £80, compared to £400-£500 for the more specialised Architectural and Professional editions. Instead, Deluxe 14 is aimed at home and small business users who need to produce blueprints, floorplans and technical drawings.

TurboCAD's latest update gets off to a poor start with an annoying activation process that requires you to fill out a form on the developer's website and wait for the activation code to be emailed to you.

It's worth it, though, as TurboCAD has a comprehensive and versatile set of drawing tools.

Much of the emphasis in this version is on 3D work. Deluxe 14 uses a 3D graphics engine called LightWorks, which provides photo-realistic lighting

effects and texture effects for the materials you use in your designs.

A key feature is the Materials Editor. This allows you to select a wide range of standard materials, such as marble, wood or even clouds, which can be used as part of the background within a 3D scene. You can then modify properties, such as the roughness of wood or the refractive properties of glass, by using simple slider controls in the Editor's dialog box. This provides an enormous amount of control over the final appearance of your 3D designs.

You can also create a variety of realistic lighting effects, ranging from tightly focused spotlights to diffused sunlight that illuminates an entire scene. It's easy to create these effects, too, as they can be selected from a quick menu list.

However, while these individual tools are all relatively straightforward, the problem with TurboCAD lies in the sheer number of tools, menus and dialog boxes that it throws at you.

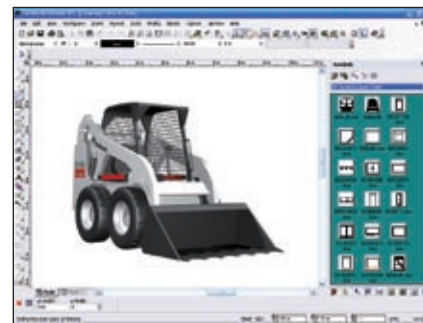
Although we appreciate the huge range of features for less than £100, it can be quite intimidating for the non-professional users that will be using Deluxe 14.

The program's documentation is part of the problem here. There's no printed manual at all; you have to buy one for £10 or

SUMMARY

- ✓ Can create realistic textures
- ✓ Photorealistic lighting tools
- ✗ Complex and difficult to master

CAD SOFTWARE Requires Windows XP or Vista, with 1GHz processor, 1GB RAM, 300MB disk space
SUPPLIER Avanquest 08000 112312
DETAILS www.avanquest.co.uk

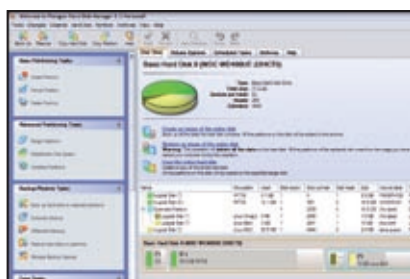


▲ TurboCAD Deluxe 14 focuses on creating photorealistic 3D models

view the 500-page PDF user guide. The latter falls into the common trap of simply listing features without really explaining how they work together to create even a simple floorplan or 3D model. The broken links to tutorials that were supposed to be found on the TurboCAD website didn't help, either.

Overall, newcomers to technical drawing and 3D work should look at some of IMSI's other products, such as FloorPlan or TurboSketch, which are both cheaper, a lot easier to use and come with printed manuals. However, if you already have some experience of CAD software, you'll find that TurboCAD Deluxe 14 provides an impressive range of tools at an extremely competitive price.

Cliff Joseph



▲ Hard Disk Manager uses graphics to give you a quick overview of your system

PARAGON Hard Disk Manager 8.5

★★★★★

From £30 inc VAT

Paragon's Hard Disk Manager 8.5 is an integrated suite of tools for managing your hard disks. While imaging, backup and recovery tools are well accounted for, the focus of the suite is on partition creation and manipulation.

Hard disks and their partitions are displayed graphically, so you get an instant snapshot of the location and size of each partition, which file system it uses, the size of the formatted volume and the amount of space left. Selecting a disk provides a wealth of further information as well as some common management tasks.

When you make fundamental changes to your computer's file system, it's essential that you don't make a mistake. Resizing the wrong partition or creating a new one in the wrong place could have disastrous consequences for your data. To reduce the risk of errors and steer you through the tools on offer, Hard Disk Manager has a large collection of step-by-step wizards. As an extra safety feature, all changes you describe through the wizards must be reviewed and approved before anything is actually altered on the disk.

Unlike other disk utilities such as Norton Ghost, individual file or folder backup is not possible; you must back up an entire drive or partition. Subsequent backups can be differential, which means only changes made since the last backup are stored. However, files can be individually recovered alongside entire disk and partition recovery. This can take place from within the Windows interface, a recovery CD or recovery partition.

Hard Disk Manager is a useful tool, especially for those with multiple operating systems, but if your backup requirements extend beyond the partition or drive level, you are better off with Acronis True Image 10 Home (see the Awards on page 56).

David McKinnon

SUMMARY

- ✓ Comprehensive partitioning tool
- ✓ Easy-to-follow wizards
- ✗ Limited backup customisation

DISK-MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE Requires Windows 9x or later, 300MHz processor, 128MB RAM, 40MB disk space. File systems: FAT16, FAT32, NTFS, Linux Ext2, Linux Ext3 and ReiserFS

SUPPLIER www.paragon-software.com

DETAILS www.amazon.co.uk



▲ GhostSurf includes six utilities to help protect your online privacy

AVANQUEST GhostSurf 2007 Platinum

★★★★★

£20 inc VAT

It's tempting to assume that your internet surfing is anonymous. In fact, this is far from the truth. GhostSurf 2007 Platinum provides a suite of utilities designed to turn this illusion into reality.

A central window provides access to six utilities. The Privacy Control Center allows you to control how visible you are on the internet, from simply blocking cookies to routing through an intermediary IP address, thus masking your physical and logical location. There's also 56-bit encryption to stop others snooping on your network traffic.

Many websites require cookies to function properly, and internet connection speeds drop as the Privacy Control Center deploys its various security measures, so thankfully you can tailor security levels to individual sites. This means that trusted sites can be surfed with little protection, while less reputable corners of the internet can be treated with caution.

The SpyCatcher utility scans and monitors your PC for signs of spyware. Scans can be manually initiated or run to a schedule and you can specifically protect against different types of spyware. A useful system-analysis tool within SpyCatcher tells you what processes and files are running on your computer. This provides far more information than the Windows Task Manager.

Of the remaining tools, Privacy Auditor keeps an eye on your internet connection for the transmission of your personal details, while AdArmour blocks pop-up ads and lets you control website components. TracksCleaner sweeps away application and browser histories, although only Internet Explorer is supported.

The only flaw is that the applications don't share a common interface, but GhostSurf 2007 Platinum is good value and has useful tools for those who are concerned about internet security.

David McKinnon

SUMMARY

- ✓ Comprehensive spyware and identity protection
- ✓ Keen price
- ✗ Inconsistent interface

ONLINE IDENTITY PROTECTOR Requires Windows 2000 or later, 350MHz processor, 64MB RAM, 16MB disk space

SUPPLIER [Avanquest 08000 112312](http://www.avanquest.com)

DETAILS www.avanquest.co.uk



▲ Keep all your passwords and usernames in one safe place with Password Manager

STEGANOS Password Manager 2007

★★★

£10 inc VAT

With the rise of email, internet banking, online shopping and an ever-expanding number of websites demanding login details comes the burden of remembering a bewildering number of usernames and passwords. Steganos Password Manager 2007 aims to ease the load.

Passwords are stored in an encrypted database, so are safe from prying eyes until you unlock them with a key password. Once open, the Password Manager displays a list of your user accounts, each of which can contain a username, password, description and notes, and can be associated with a URL. You can also group login details by type, which makes managing large number of entries easier.

Password Manager can detect when you first log into a site and claims to capture the username, password and URL on the fly. However, it failed to register many login procedures we tried. We were also unable to log in to those sites automatically even after an entry had been created manually.

Manually creating entries doesn't take long, though, and neither does recalling them. When you navigate to a website that requires a login, simply open the entry in Password Manager and drag and drop the username and password into the webpage. This level of control over the login process is more comforting than the automated process, which can be disquieting. For added security, Password Manager locks after a predefined idle time, so if you forget to close the application your passwords aren't left lying around should someone else use your PC.

Although the automated processes are more miss than hit, Password Manager still secures your login details efficiently and makes them easily accessible when needed. However, a free, albeit less user-friendly, alternative is available from <http://sourceforge.net/projects/keepass> for those with an empty wallet.

David McKinnon

SUMMARY

- ✓ Simple and secure
- ✗ Auto-complete function doesn't always work
- ✗ Good, free alternatives are available

PASSWORD MANAGER Requires Windows 2000 or later, Pentium or equivalent processor, 128MB RAM, 100MB disk space

SUPPLIER www.steganos.co.uk

DETAILS www.steganos.co.uk